

# FOR THE GENESIS OF INTERVIEW AS A GENRE

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## Abstract

The word ‘interview’ was first introduced in 1867 and appeared in the OED in 1869. The first examples of interview as a means of spreading information via press date to no earlier than 1830s. So, the discovery of dialogues, included in old Georgian text, which fully comply with criteria of journalistic interview’s matrix, is worthy of serious study. “Mimoslva” is a travel essay written in 1750s by Archbishop Timothy Gabashvili (1704-1764), prominent Georgian religious figure, diplomat, writer and traveler. In some parts of the essay it is apparent that Gabashvili is playing the role of interviewer. And the main interviewee is Eugenios Boulgaris (1716-1806), renowned Greek theologian, Rector of famous Orthodox School of Mount Athos. Nowadays, for journalism as a creative act, adequate up-to-date technology is of vital importance, but it becomes insignificant when it comes to the first samples of journalism. The same can be stated regarding Gabashvili’s interview. At the time when the interview was conducted (1756), Gabashvili was able to produce his text only as a manuscript which is the form in which it eventually appeared. So, the text was realized. It should be mentioned that the first edition of Gabashvili’s work (1852) chronologically precedes the first samples of complete interviews and the word ‘interview’ itself. In conclusion, in the light of the archeology of journalism, I suggest that until the discovery of an older example that would fit the matrix of interview-as-genre, Gabashvili’s interview should be deemed as the oldest interview in the history of journalism.

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## Introduction:

Interview is one of the most popular genres in contemporary journalism. Even today, when the lines between the various genres of media have become blurred, interview manages to maintain its unique position as well as its traditional characteristics.

There is interview as a method and interview as a genre.

From the ancient times, the method of interview has been employed in different parts of social life: in pedagogy, medicine, jurisprudence, business and, of course, in journalism. But, in journalism the use of interview does not necessarily imply producing an article pertaining to the genre of interview. Journalist can use information acquired in an interview, to write news, commentary, correspondence, reportages or essays. However, we will focus on the genre of interview, an article which presents questions from the journalist and answers from the respondent, taken down verbatim.

So, what are the characteristics of the journalistic interview as a genre?

— As a rule, an interview reflects reality and is presented in the form of questions and answers.

— While holding an interview, one party – the respondent or the interviewee, is the possessor and source of some definite information; the other – the journalist or the interviewer – is the receiver and disseminator of this information.

— An interview-as-genre must pertain to something topical and interesting for general audience, not just for the journalist who conducts it. It implies readership, listenership or viewership.

- An interview, unlike all other journalistic genres, serves to show the opinion of the respondents but not of the journalists themselves.
- An interview excludes discussion.
- The time interval between the interview taking place and being published or broadcast should be as short as possible.

This is a kind of matrix for journalistic interviews, criteria for deciding whether a Q and A text can be discussed as interview-as-method or interview-as-genre.

There is a no agreement when it comes to the origin of the Q and A style interview as a journalistic genre, though it is widely believed to be originated in the United States during the nineteenth century. Some consider the interviews conducted by Joseph Burbridge McCullagh (1842–1896), the first reporter of the White House, to be the first examples of the genre. Other candidates include the interrogation of the participants of the Raid on Harpers Ferry, conducted by the reporter of the “New-York Herald”; the questions and answers exchanged between Horace Greeley (1811-1872), the editor of the “New-York Tribune” and the Head of the Mormon Church Brigham Young (1801-1877); and the testimony of brothel-owner Rosina Townsend concerning the murder of the 22 year-old prostitute Helen Jewett, also published in the “New-York Herald”.

Accordingly, some researchers consider that the first examples of interview-as-genre appeared in the press in the second half of the 1860s, others name 1859, and some point to examples from as early as 1835.

Swedish born scientist Nils Gunnar Nilsson, Professor at Minnesota University, has argues that the interview emerged as a subgenre of crime reporting and was used to expose the so-called “human stories” in the American press of the nineteenth century.

However, many of the examples considered today as the first journalistic interviews are more akin to interview-as-method rather than interview-as-genre. Indeed, it has been argued that the interview-as-genre only truly emerged alongside the spread of radio and television in the twentieth century. As for the word “interview” itself, was first introduced by Joseph Burbridge McCullagh in 1867; and first appeared in the OED in 1869.

Nevertheless, in the study of journalism around the world, the first examples of the interview as a means of delivering and spreading information via the press date to no earlier than the 1830s.

Bearing this in mind, the discovery of dialogues included in old Georgian text, which fully comply with the criteria of the journalistic interview, is worthy of serious study.

The text “Mimoslva” is a long travel essay written in the 1750s by Timothy Gabashvili (1704-1764), a prominent Georgian religious figure, first the Archbishop of Kutaisi and later the Archbishop of Kartli, a diplomat, a writer and a traveler.

In a number of parts of the essay it is readily apparent that Timothy Gabashvili is playing the role of the interviewer employing the term as used today.

The main interviewee is Eugenios Boulgaris (1716-1806), renowned Greek Orthodox educator, theologian, and Rector of the famous Orthodox School of Mount Athos, a person, with an extremely impressive biography, and dubbed by Gabashvili as “the new Plato”.

In 1956, Professor Helen Metreveli (1917-2003) published the text of “Mimoslva” with the scientific apparatus. Despite a thorough and painstaking study of the text, further analysis at the inter-disciplinary level has revealed some passages which are of great significance for the archaeology of Georgian, and indeed global, journalism and to which no attention was paid before.

The “Archeology of Journalism” is a term composed and introduced in my studies as an analogue to “An Archaeology of Human Sciences” by Michel Foucault (1966).

According to my definition, the Archeology of Journalism studies pre-press journalism, i.e., the elements of journalistic comprehension of reality, journalistic thinking,

journalistic styles and journalistic form that can be found within texts that appeared before the emergence of mass market newspapers.

There is no necessity in this thesis to present a full analysis of Timothy Gabashvili's theological and historical-philological questions and Eugenios Boulgaris's answers. However, in spite of the fact that the questions and answers exchanged between Timothy Gabashvili and Eugenios Boulgaris show traces of periphrasis and have neither been printed in the press, nor recorded by a journalist, according to today's understanding of a journalistic interview, the text is in fact more of an interview than the various American texts, which are considered to be the first examples of interview and are related to the genesis of interview as a journalistic genre.

What is journalism in general? When, in what manner and where did it derive from? This matter is meticulously discussed in our survey "For the Genesis of Georgian Journalism" (2008); so, we will not go further in this and only give our definition of journalism:

Journalism is a unity of the technological and creative forms of obtaining, recording, accumulating, processing and spreading information of high public interest or concern.

In the historical discourse, in its essence, journalism consists of two branches:

From the point of view of technology, being related to the means of dissemination of the information, journalism completely depends on scientific and technological progress and develops in parallel with it. However, from the point of view of creativity, journalism is a form of attitude towards reality, as well as the form of depicting it.

In spite of the fact that technology substantially determines the characteristics of this or that form of journalism, as well as of its development, it still plays a lesser role because of the fact that journalism, as something pertaining to creativity, can exist without it. The print media is naturally a journalistic technology, but everything printed in newspapers and magazines is not necessarily an example of journalistic work. On the other hand, a text which is not disseminated to the public via journalistic technology, in its essence, can easily be linked to journalism.

In the modern world, for journalism as a creative act, adequate and up-to-date technology is of vital importance, but it becomes insignificant when it comes to the first samples of journalism and its genesis.

Journalism, as a creative process and journalism as a technological environment were born and developed independently and in some cases they did not overlap for long periods of time.

The same can be stated regarding Timothy Gabashvili's interview. At the time when the interview was conducted, it was simply impossible for its author to disseminate it widely to the public via an appropriate technological means, as at that time such technology was simply not available for Gabashvili specifically, and for the Georgian language in general.

Timothy Gabashvili was able to produce his text only as a manuscript which is the form in which it eventually appeared. So, the text was realized. But even if this interview appeared in book form rather than via the press, radio, television or the Internet, the book is nevertheless an appropriate medium for the dissemination of the interview. In any case, before printing the first newspaper, the book was the most convenient means used to disseminate information to the general public. Before the first newspaper saw the light of day, Pietro Aretino's (1492-1556) letters, often considered to be the first journalist in world history, were published in books; and, researchers consider, this laid the foundation of modern journalism. Also, it should be mentioned that the first edition of Timothy Gabashvili's work (published by Platon Ioseliani in 1852) chronologically precedes the first samples of complete interviews and the word "interview" itself.

In addition to the extracts discussed above, Timothy Gabashvili's book abounds with passages marking the beginning of the journalistic interview. In these passages Gabashvili refers to the form of interview, as it was later termed, in order to learn the names of the

builders of this or that monastery or church; and to his questions he receives explicit and clearly formulated answers. His interest in the builders' identity is natural, but the method he uses to obtain the information was strange at that time and, I would argue, unprecedented. The work obviously implies the method of interview which Timothy Gabashvili himself termed 'sitq'visgeba' thorough or questions and answers, which is a method more characteristic of a journalistic text rather than for a work of history or literature.

We should also emphasize that in "Mimoslva", the passage where Timothy Gabashvili interviews Eugenios Boulgaris, a person whose name was known to the public is of special interest. The text shows that the "interviewer" visited Karyes, the capital of Mount Athos where he met a famous theologian and, as we today would say, asked a few questions. In addition, the Georgian Archbishop and "journalist" did not ask "simple" questions to his respondent, such as the questions concerning the identity of the builders of the monasteries.

Eugenios Boulgaris was a well known and scandalous figure in the Christian world of the mid-eighteenth century; he was precisely the sort of man who is so frantically and desperately haunted by journalists nowadays.

As we learn from "Mimoslva", Timothy Gabashvili met Eugenios Boulgaris for the first time in Vatopedi Monastery on March 25, 1756, on the Day of the Annunciation. The following day he paid a visit to Boulgaris in the theological school, and once again after St Thomas's day. According to the book, the interview took place in the Theological School on the occasion of Gabashvili's second visit.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, in the light of the Archeology of journalism, I suggest that, until the discovery of an older example that would fit the matrix of the interview-as-genre, Timothy Gabashvili's questions and answers with Eugenios Boulgaris, presented in his travel book, should be deemed as the oldest example of the interview in the history of journalism.

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